



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Cape Verde

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2003](#)

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Cape Verde is a multiparty parliamentary democracy in which constitutional powers were shared among the elected Head of State, President Pedro Verona Rodrigues Pires, former president of the African Party for the Independence of Cape Verde (PAICV); the head of government, Prime Minister Jose Maria Neves; and Neves' party, the PAICV. In January 2001, Pires was elected by a margin of 12 votes over the country's former prime minister and Movement for Democracy (MPD) president, Carlos Veiga, in what the National Electoral Commission and international media judged to be free and fair elections. The judiciary generally was independent.

The police have primary responsibility for maintenance of law and order. Civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. Some members of the security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country had a market-based economy but little industry and few exploitable natural resources. In 2002, per capita income was estimated at \$1,300. The country had a long history of economically driven emigration, and remittances from citizens abroad remained an important source of income. The country produced food for only 15 percent of its population of approximately 460,000, which resulted in heavy reliance on international food aid.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. There continued to be credible reports of police abuse. Prison conditions were poor. The judicial system was overburdened, and lengthy delays in trials were common. There were some limitations on press freedom, and there continued to be allegations of media self-censorship. Violence and discrimination against women and mistreatment of children continued to be serious problems.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1 Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The Constitution prohibits such practices; however, there were credible reports that police continued to beat persons in custody and in detention, despite government efforts to stop such practices.

The Government investigated allegations of human rights abuses by police; however, these investigations did not result in any legal action against the perpetrators.

Prison conditions were poor, and facilities were severely overcrowded. Sanitation and medical assistance were poor; however, a doctor and a nurse were available, and prisoners were taken to the public hospitals for serious problems. Psychological problems among prisoners were common. Although women and men were held

separately, juveniles were not held separate from adults, and pretrial detainees were not held separate from convicted prisoners.

The Government permitted both formal visits by human rights monitors to prisons and routine visits to individual prisoners; however, there were no such visits during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest, Detention, or Exile

The law prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

The country's police force is organized nationally under the Ministry of Justice and is made up of the Public Order Police, which are responsible for enforcement, and the Judicial Police, which are responsible for investigations. Corruption was not a significant problem, and police were subject to legal and disciplinary measures in cases of misconduct. Logistical constraints, including lack of vehicles, limited communications equipment, and poor forensic capacity, limited police effectiveness.

The law stipulates that a suspect must be charged before a judge within 48 hours of arrest. Police may not make arrests without a court order unless a person is caught in the act of committing a felony. The courts had jurisdiction over state security cases, and there was a functioning system of bail.

The Constitution does not provide for forced exile, and the Government did not use it.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice. The investigation continued in the 2000 case of a former Prime Minister accused of embezzling approximately \$16,250 (2 million Cape Verdean escudos) in the privatization of ENACOL (a parastatal oil supply firm).

The judicial system was composed of the Supreme Court and the regional courts. Of the five Supreme Court judges, one was appointed by the President, one by the National Assembly, and three by the Superior Judiciary Council. This council consisted of the President of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, eight private citizens, two judges, two prosecutors, the senior legal inspector of the Attorney General's office, and a representative of the Ministry of Justice. Judges were independent and could not belong to a political party.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair trial. Defendants are presumed to be innocent; they have the right to a public, nonjury trial; to counsel; to present witnesses; and to appeal verdicts. Free counsel was provided for the indigent. Regional courts adjudicated minor disputes on the local level in rural areas. The Ministry of Justice did not have judicial powers; such powers were with the courts. Defendants could appeal regional court decisions to the Supreme Court.

The judiciary generally provides due process rights; however, the right to an expeditious trial was constrained by a seriously overburdened and understaffed judicial system. A backlog of cases routinely led to trial delays of 6 months or more; more than 10,500 cases were pending at the end of 2001.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2 Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected freedom of speech; however, there were some reports of restrictions on freedom of the press. There is a substantial and growing independent press; however, there continued to be criticism by many prominent government and opposition figures of state-controlled television for its failure to properly exercise its role of

informing the public regarding political and economic issues. There continued to be reports of media self-censorship.

There were three independent newspapers and one state-owned newspaper; six independent radio stations and one state-owned radio station; and one state-owned television station and two foreign-owned stations. Foreign broadcasts were permitted. Journalists were independent of government control and were not required to reveal their sources; however, there were credible reports that journalists associated with the government-controlled media practiced self-censorship.

The law requires a formal licensing mechanism for mass media, including government authorization to broadcast; however, there were no reports that licenses were denied or revoked or that the Government refused to authorize broadcasts during the year.

In July 2002, former Chief Justice Oscar Gomes filed a criminal complaint against private attorney Rui Aradjo, who had accused the Chief Justice in a local newspaper of rigging the 2001 Presidential election; the case remained under investigation at year's end.

In November 2002, the Public Prosecutor charged the newspaper A Semana with defamation in response to an article alleging that judges and public prosecutors in a local government district had accepted bribes in exchange for favorable judgments, fraternized with plaintiffs and defendants, and indulged in public drunkenness. The court of first instance found the defendants guilty; the case was pending appeal before the Supreme Court at year's end.

Freedom of expression may or may not be used as a defense in cases involving defamation or offense to personal honor. Despite the broadly interpreted criminal libel laws, no independent media outlets reported direct pressure in their daily operations or business activities.

The Government did not restrict Internet access.

The Government did not restrict academic freedom.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice.

The Catholic majority enjoyed a privileged status in national life. For example, the Government provided the Catholic Church with free television broadcast time for religious services and observed its holy days as official holidays.

To be recognized as legal entities by the Government, religious groups must register with the Ministry of Justice; however, failure to do so did not result in any restriction on religious belief or practice.

The trial of four individuals of the "Sao Domingos Group," who were accused of desecrating a Catholic Church in 1996 began in 2001; however, there was no verdict at year's end.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2003 International Religious Freedom Report](http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2003/27717pf.htm).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The Constitution provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The law provides for the granting of refugee status or asylum to persons who meet the definition in the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement and granted refugee status or asylum. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government

also provided protection to certain individuals who fall outside of the definition of the 1951 U.N. Convention Related to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol.

Section 3 Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage. In January 2001, Pedro Verona Rodrigues Pires, former president of the PAICV, was elected by a margin of 12 votes over the country's former Prime Minister and MPD president, Carlos Veiga. The principal opposition party, the MPD, held power from 1991 until 2001, after defeating the PAICV, which held power in a one-party state from independence in 1975 until 1991. The PAICV won the legislative elections in 2000 and has an absolute majority in the National Assembly. The National Electoral Commission and the international media judged the January presidential elections, as well as legislative and municipal elections in 2000, to be free and fair.

The Constitution provides for the separation of powers. Constitutional powers were shared among President Pires, Prime Minister Jose Maria Neves, and the PAICV party. Cabinet ministers were subject to confirmation by the President. Collectively they must retain the support of a parliamentary majority. The President could dismiss the Government with the approval of the political parties represented in the National Assembly and the Council of the Republic. This council consisted of the President of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister, the President of the Constitutional Court, the Attorney General, the Ombudsman, the President of the Economic and Social Council, the former presidents, and five private citizens appointed by the President. The MPD and the Democratic Renovation Party were the main opposition parties.

There were 11 women among the elected deputies in the 72-seat National Assembly and 4 women in the 17-member Cabinet.

Section 4 Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic human rights groups generally operated without government restriction, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials generally were cooperative and responsive to their views.

There are three private human rights groups: The National Commission of the Rights of Man, the Ze Moniz Association, and the Alcides Barros Association.

The powers of the independent Ombudsman, who serves a 5-year term, were defined in July; however, no Ombudsman had been elected by year's end.

Section 5 Discrimination Based on Race, Sex, Disability, Language, or Social Status

The Constitution prohibits discrimination based on race, sex, religion, disability, language, or social status; however, the Government did not enforce these provisions effectively, and not all elements of society, particularly women and children, enjoyed full protection against discrimination.

Women

Domestic violence against women, including wife beating, was common. The Government and civil society encouraged women to report criminal offenses such as rape and spousal abuse to the police; however, according to the media and a July 2002 report by the Women Jurists' Association, longstanding social and cultural values inhibited victims from doing so. Nevertheless, reporting of such crimes to police continued to increase during the year, and violence against women was the subject of extensive public service media coverage in both government- and opposition-controlled media.

While there were mechanisms to deal with spousal abuse, in practice these mechanisms neither ensured the punishment of all those responsible nor effectively prevented future violence. Women's organizations, like the Women Jurists' Association, continued to seek legislation to establish a special family court to address crimes of domestic violence and abuse; however, there was no such legislation by year's end. The revised Penal Code protects certain rights of the victims of sexual abuse; however, it did not ensure compensation.

Despite constitutional prohibitions against sex discrimination and provisions for full equality, including equal pay for equal work, discrimination against women continued. Although they often were paid less than men for comparable work, women were making inroads in various professions, especially in the private sector.

The Constitution prohibits discrimination against women in inheritance, family, and custody matters; however, women often were reluctant to seek redress of domestic disputes in the courts. The Organization of Cape Verdean Women alleged that there was discriminatory treatment in inheritance matters, despite laws that called for equal rights. For example, some women were pressured to sign judicial agreements detrimental to their statutory inheritance rights.

The Women Jurists' Association provided free legal assistance to women throughout the country suffering from social abuse (both violence and discrimination) and spousal abuse.

Children

The Government remained committed to children's rights and welfare. The Government provided free, mandatory education for 6 years of primary school for all children, which normally covered children from age 6 to age 12. Education was compulsory until age 16; however, secondary education was free only for children whose families had an annual income below approximately \$1,700 (160,000 Cape Verdean escudos). According to 2001 Ministry of Education statistics, primary school attendance was approximately 98 percent. Attendance rates by boys and girls differed by less than 1 percent.

Students may be suspended from classes during pregnancy or nursing. Individual schools were responsible for enforcing the rule, and according to press reports, one student was suspended during the year.

Child abuse and mistreatment, sexual violence against children, and juvenile prostitution were problems, exacerbated by chronic poverty, large unplanned families, and traditionally high levels of emigration of adult men. The media reported cases of sexual abuse against children and adolescents. The inefficiencies of the judicial system made it difficult for government institutions to address the problem.

Persons with Disabilities

Although the Constitution mandates "special protection" for the aged and persons with disabilities, the Government did not require access to public buildings or services for persons with disabilities; however, there was no discrimination against persons with disabilities in employment and education. There were no official schools or trained teachers for persons with disabilities, which disadvantaged children with disabilities. Several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), including an association for the blind, were active.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The Constitution provides that workers legally are free to form and join unions without government authorization or restriction. There were two umbrella union associations: The Council of Free Labor Unions, composed of 14 unions with approximately 18,000 members; and the National Union of Cape Verde Workers (UNTC-CS), formed by the former ruling party but operated independently, which included 14 unions with approximately 20,000 members. The Government did not interfere with the activities of these organizations; however, the UNTC-CS claimed that it received less than its share of funds for unions. Both unions suffered from a shortage of funds.

The law provides that if an employer fires a worker without a "just cause," as defined by the law, such as for union activity, the employer either must reinstate the worker or provide financial compensation to the worker. The law bans antiunion discrimination by employers with fines for offenders. No cases were brought to court during the year.

Unions were free to affiliate internationally and had ties with African and other international trade union organizations.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The Constitution provides for the right to organize, to operate without hindrance, and to sign collective work

contracts; however, there has been very little collective bargaining. There were no signed collective bargaining agreements. The International Labor Organization (ILO) has cited the Government for its inability to provide examples of signed collective bargaining agreements.

Workers and management in the small private sector, as well as in the public sector, normally reached agreement through negotiations. Although there were no collective labor contracts, workers succeeded in negotiating important issues such as salary increases. However, as the country's largest employer, the Government continued to play the dominant role in setting wages. It did not fix wages for the private sector, but salary levels for civil servants provided the basis for wage negotiations in the private sector.

The Constitution provides union members with the right to strike, but the Government at times limited this right. In the past, when workers attempted to strike, the Government invoked a "civil request" under which it had the power, in an emergency or if a strike threatened coverage of basic needs, to name a list of minimum services that a union must continue to provide during any strike. Despite numerous ILO requests, the Government continued to requisition workers to curtail strikes and to interpret essential services in the broadest terms. In 2000, the ILO recommended that the law be changed, and during the year, the UNTC-CS submitted to the Government its draft of a new labor code.

The Government took measures to amend its legislation so that if parties disagreed on the minimum services to be provided during strikes, an independent body could resolve the dispute. However, at year's end, the Government had not created an independent body to resolve such differences.

During the year, there was one legal strike by workers at Interbase, a fishery company, for higher wages. During the year, anti-erosion employees of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fish threatened to strike several times and held peaceful demonstrations. These workers have been negotiating with the Ministry of Finance for unpaid wages for work completed in 1997 and 1999. The case still was pending at year's end.

Praia has a 30-acre export processing zone (EPZ), which housed two Portuguese companies and a Cape Verdean-Senegalese joint venture. There were no special laws or exemptions from regular labor laws for EPZs.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Bonded Labor

The law prohibits forced or bonded labor, including by children, and there were no reports that such practices occurred.

d. Status of Child Labor Practices and Minimum Age for Employment

The law prohibits children under the age of 16 from working at night, more than 7 hours per day, or in establishments where toxic products were produced; however, the Government rarely enforced the law, and child labor occurred. The legal minimum age for employment was 14 years. In practice the Ministry of Justice and Labor enforced minimum age laws only in the urban, formal sectors of the economy, and with limited success.

The Government was working with the ILO and the International Program for the Elimination of Child Labor to eliminate child labor.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There were no established minimum wage rates in the private sector. Large urban private employers linked their minimum wages to those paid to civil servants. For an entry-level worker, this wage is approximately \$120 (12,000 Cape Verdean escudos) per month. The majority of jobs paid wages insufficient to provide a worker and family with a decent standard of living; most workers relied on second jobs and extended family support.

The maximum legal workweek for adults was 44 hours. While large employers generally respected these regulations, many domestic servants and agricultural laborers worked longer hours.

The Director General of Labor conducted sporadic inspections to enforce the labor code and imposed fines on private enterprises that were not in conformity with the law. However, the Government did not enforce labor laws systematically, and much of the labor force did not enjoy their protection. Few industries employed heavy or dangerous equipment, and work-related accidents were rare.

There is no legal provision for workers to remove themselves from unsafe working conditions without jeopardizing their continued employment.

Foreign workers required both a work permit (granted by immigration authorities) and a work contract (approved by the Ministry of Labor). If in compliance with these requirements, foreign workers were protected fully by the law; however, there were no provisions to protect illegal foreign workers.

f. Trafficking in Persons

The law does not specifically prohibit trafficking in adult persons; however, the law prohibits child trafficking. There were no reports that persons were trafficked to, from, or within the country. The penalty for child traffickers is 12 to 20 years' imprisonment. The illegal smuggling of economic emigrants to various points in Europe was believed to be a thriving business. This smuggling involved visa and related fraud; however, there were no reports that these persons were transported into forced labor or debt bondage. The country was a transit point for smugglers, and smuggling had become a concern for local authorities. Several press reports noted that the police had arrested some persons, smugglers as well as victims, yet there were no credible reports of actual cases. The Government cooperated with European authorities, neighboring governments, and foreign embassies to deal with the problem.